

**Congress of the United States**  
Washington, DC 20515

August 5, 2005

His Excellency Jalal Talabani  
President of Iraq

Dear Mr. President,

As Members of the United States House of Representatives and Senate, we commend the Transitional National Assembly and the people of Iraq on the progress you have achieved toward a free and a representative democratic government. However, the central principle of true democracy is liberty and justice for all, and it is our understanding that the current draft of the constitution contains provisions that weaken the liberties and freedoms of Iraqi women. These provisions raise great concerns among us.

We are distressed with the proposal to eliminate the requirement that secures 25 percent of parliamentary seats for women. Today, Iraqi women occupy 31 percent of the seats in the National Assembly. These women are playing a critical role in the future of Iraq and should not be denied their rightful place in society.

We also have concerns with the article that promotes the role of tribes in law and civil society. Historically women have suffered an inferior status under such a tribal system. Instead, the Assembly should include provisions in Iraq's Constitution that provide social care and security to Iraq's women, mothers, and children.

Of greatest concern, however, is the provision that provides equal rights for women *unless those rights contradict Sharia Law*. The Transitional National Assembly should support principles of democracy that guarantee human and women's rights, without placing caveats.

More than 2,000 women ran for office in Iraq's historic January 2005 parliamentary elections. As the Transitional National Assembly continues in their efforts, we strongly encourage the Assembly to support provisions that solidify the rights of Iraqi women in the new constitution. While women's rights were severely limited in the past, Iraq now has an historic opportunity to expand their roles and afford women a strong voice in the country's government. We recognize the need to affirm the spirit and free the energies of those women who have spent countless hours, years, and lifetimes working for the basic human right of equal protection under the constitution.

The central principles of a true democracy – liberty, justice, and representative government – must apply equally to women. We, as Americans and Members of Congress, continue to stand with you and the people of Iraq as your country grows and democracy takes root.

Sincerely,

Kay Bailey Hutchison

Tom Osborne

Ellen O'Leary

Hilda L. Solis

Barbara Lee

Judy Biggert

Loretta Sanchez

Jim Schumaker

Eddie Bernice Johnson

Melissa A. Hart

Jane Harman

Barbara Christensen

Kay Granger

Jimmy Brown-Walton

Lois Capps

Lump Moon

Frank A. Davis

Stephanie Tubo Jones

Betty McCollum

Jenny Baldwin

Juli Carson

Corrine Brown

Louise M Slaughter

Mary Kaptur

Donis O. Matzui

Ally J. Knud

Sue Myrick

Katherine Harris

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Neda M. Lowery

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Carolyn McCarthy

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